

Message Text

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CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 2160

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PFOR, LA, FR

SUBJECT: A FRENCH VIEW OF LAOS

REF VIENTIANE 2064

SUMMARY: FRENCH EMBASSY COUNSELOR CHRISTIAN LAMBERT BELIVES THAT ABOUT NINETY PERCENT OF THE LAO POPULATION NOW OPPOSES THE LPDR GOVERNMENT, WHEREAS A LITTLE OVER A YEAR AGO THE SAME PROPORTION REJOICED AT THE COMMUNIST TAKEOVER. LAMBERT THINKS THAT THIS OPPOSITION POSES A SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL PROBLEM FOR THE LPDR, BUT DOES NOT THREATEN ITS OVERTHROW, SINCE THE SRV WOULD NOT ALLOW THIS TO HAPPEN. LAMBERT ADDS THAT GUERRILLA ACTIVITY IN SEVERAL REGIONS OF THE COUNTRY COULD NOT CONTINUE WITOUT POPULAR SUPPORT, AND THAT THE SRV HAS HAD TO MOVE A LIMITED NUMBER OF TROOPS INTO THE TROUBLED AREAS TO ENGAGE THE REBELS IN PLACE OF THE INEFFECTIVE LAO PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY (LPLA). THE FRENCH DELEGATION INVITED BY THE LAO TO DISCUSS OVERALL POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL RELATIONS IS NOW EXPECTED TO ARRIVE IN LATE SEPTEMBER BUT WILL NOT BE HEADED BY A HIGH
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LEVEL FIGURE. PRELIMINARY AGREEMENTS HAVE ALREADY BEEN REACHED

BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM OF THE LAO TAKEOVER OF SEVERAL FRENCH INVESTMENTS. LAMBERT SAID THAT NO MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED FRENCH TEACHERS AND EXPERTS ARE EXPECTED TO WORK IN LAOS THIS COMING YEAR. COMPARED TO ABOUT THREE HUNDRED THE PAST YEAR. END SUMMARY.

1. FRENCH EMBASSY COUNSELOR LAMBERT, WHILE BRIEFLY ACTING AS CHARGE, ASKED EMBOFF IN FOR BRIEF TOUR D' HORIZON OF LAO AFFAIRS. LAMBERT SAID THAT ABOUT 85 PERCENT OF THE LAO PEOPLE HAD WELCOMED THE LAO PATRIOTIC FRONT TAKEOVER OF LAOS IN MAY, 1976, WHEREAS ABOUT NINETY PERCENT OF THE POPULATION WAS NOW OPPOSED TO THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT. THE LAO PEOPLE WERE ESSENTIALLY PASSIVE, HOWEVER, AND THEIR OPPOSITION POSED NO THREAT TO THE LPDR. MOREOVER, HE CONTINUED, THE SRV WOULD NOT TOLERATE A LOSS OF POWER BY THE LPDR. BUT LAMBERT DID CONSIDER THAT OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT WAS A SIGNIFICANT FACT POLITICALLY AND ONE WHICH CONCERNED THE LPDR LEADERSHIP.

2. POPULAR OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT, HE NOTED, PROVIDED SUPPORT ESSENTIAL TO THE CONTINUATION OF THE MILITARY RESISTANCE TO THE LPDR IN A NUMBER OF AREAS OF LAOS. LAMBERT SHOWED EMBOFF IN CONFIDENCE NEWLY DRAWN MAPS SHOWING AREAS OF GUERRILLA ACTIVITY ALONG THE WESTERN BORDER OF SAYABOURY PROVINCE IN LAOS ADJACENT TO THAILAND, IN THE MUONG (MEO) AREAS OF XIENG KHOUANY PROVINCE, NORTH OF PAKSANE, AROUND NONG BOK BETWEEN THAKHEK AND SAVANNAKHET, AND IN SEVERAL AREAS AROUND PAKSE IN CHAMPASSAK PROVINCE. NORTH OF PAKSANE, HE SAID, THE LPLA HAD LOST 100 KILLED AND 150 WOUNDED IN A CLASH JULY 21, AND THE VIETNAMESE HAD TO MOVE TROOPS IN TO TAKE OVER FROM THE INEFFECTIVE LAO GOVERNMENT TROOPS.

3. AS FOR FRENCH-LAO RELATIONS, LAMBERT SAID THE FRENCH DELEGATION NOW PLANNED TO VISIT LAOS TOWARD THE END OF SEPTEMBER BUT WOULD NOT BE HEADED BY A HIGH LEVEL PERSONAGE AS THE LAO WOULD HAVE LIKED. HE ADDED THAT PRELIMINARY AGREEMENTS HAD ALREADY BEEN REACHED BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM OF THE LPDR TAKEOVER OF FRENCH INVESTMENTS IN THE BRASSERIES ET GLACIERES DU LAOS (BGL) BOTTLING PLANE NEAR VIENTPGNE AND SOCIETE DES MINES DE NONG SUNG TIN MINE AT PHON TIOU NORTH OF THAKHEK. LAMBERT SAID BGL WAS EXPECTED TO RESUME OPERATIONS
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AROUND THE END OF THE YEAR. (VIENTIANE 6543 OF 1975 REPORTED BGL WAS CLOSING OPERATIONS AROUND THE END OF LAST YEAR.) LAMBERT ALSO SAID THAT THIS FALL ONLY ABOUT EIGHTY OR ONE HUNDRED FRENCH TEACHERS AND EXPERTS WOULD BE COMING TO LAOS COMPARED TO ABOUT THREE HUNDRED LAST YEAR.

4. FINALLY, IN DISCUSSING PRIME MINISTER KAYSONE'S VISIT TO MOSCOW, LAMBERT STATED THAT LAO TUDENTS WERE TRAINING IN USSR

TO FLY MIG'S AND THAT SOVIETS PLANNED TO SEND ABOUT FIFTEEN OLD
MODEL MIG'S TO BE STATIONED IN NORTHERN LAOS AFTER PILOTS
COMPLETED TRAINING.

5. COMMENT: LAMBERT'S PLOTS OF AREAS OF GUERRILLA ACTIVITY
GENERALLY COINCIDE WITH THOSE REPORTED BY OTHER SOURCES EXCEPT
FOR THE WESTERN BORDER OF SAYABOURY. THAT MOUNTAINOUS AREA IS
REPORTEDLY USED BY THE LAO AND VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST FORCES TO
SUPPORT THE THAI INSURGENTS IN NAN PROVINCE.

6. HIS ESTIMATES THAT NINETY PERCENT OF THE POPULATION SUPPORTED
THE LPDR A YEAR AGO AND OPPOSE IT TODAY ARE, OF COURSE, NOT
BASED ON ANY OBJECTIVE SURVEY OR SAMPLING. "POPULAR SUPPORT" AS
A TERM RELATING TO ANTI-LPDR GUERRILLA ACTIVITY IS SO IMPRECISE
AS TO BE MEANINGLESS. THERE IS, WE KNOW, ARMED OPPOSITION TO
THE LPDR GOVERNMENT CONDUCTED PRIMARILY BY REMNANTS OF THE FORMER
ROYAL ARMED FORCES IN SOUTHERN LAOS AND SPECIFICALLY BY THE
FORMER MILITARY REGION II (VANG PAO) FORCES IN CENTRAL
LAOS ADJACENT TO THE PLAIN OF JARS. THE LATTER FORCES TRAD-
ITIONALLY INCLUDE CIVILIANS AND DEPENDENTS. IN GENERAL, HOWEVER,
WE WOULD DESCRIBE "POPULAR SUPPORT" AS THE SORT OF TRADITIONAL
ACQUIESCENCE BY RURAL CIVILIANS IN THE ACTIONS OF IRREGULAR
FORCES.
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